

## SUMMARY MINUTES

### ISLAMORADA, VILLAGE OF ISLANDS PARKS & RECREATION CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

Meeting started at 5:20 p.m. at the Founders Park Community Center

#### CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

#### PRESENT:

Carolyn Wightman, Natasha Early, David Epstein, Christy Hughes, Ted Benbow, John Weare, Joseph Jannach, Maria Bagiotti (IVOI), Anne Onsgard (IVOI), Alicia Mote (IVOI)

#### ABSENT:

Alina Davis, Richard Russell, Shannon Cary, Eduardo Suarez - Justified

#### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman asked Alicia Mote to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETINGS:

Both the May 16<sup>th</sup> and September 18<sup>th</sup> minutes were unanimously approved by the Committee. Carolyn moved to approve; Joe seconded the motion.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mallory Hughes, a Coral Shores Sophomore and Life Scout with Troop 114, presented her Eagle Scout project idea to the Committee. She stated that the rank of Eagle Scout is an extremely high honor, and to obtain this honor one must facilitate a project that is beneficial to the community. She stated she would like to install a bicycle repair station near the entrance to Founders Park. She feels that having a device like this available to the public will enhance the park and make it more accessible to those who frequently ride their bicycles into or past Founders Park. She distributed paperwork with information for a prospective 10ft by 9ft concrete pad and information on the manufacturer of the bicycle repair station and accessories to be installed on the concrete pad. Carolyn asked Mallory what type of support she would need from the Committee. Mallory expressed that funding would be appreciated, although she is open to seeking community sponsors, donations, and fundraising. She also would need permission to dig into the ground approximately 6 inches to safely install the station. She stated that per the Eagle Scout handbook, she is not allowed to do any physical work on the project herself, she would instead need to recruit people from the community and demonstrate leadership skills in facilitating the project. Maria confirmed with the Committee that all members agree it is a good project and to move forward with it. She then said she plans to meet with Mallory to discuss the details. Mallory stated that the cost of the project should be around \$3,000. The Committee agreed to recommend that Mallory move forward with this project.

## VILLAGE CONSERVATION PROPERTIES AND FOUNDERS PARK BREAKWATER:

Peter Frezza gave an updated presentation on the Village conservation properties. Peter reiterated to the Committee that per the state issued management plans, there are certain obligations that need to be carried out within these plans for each passive park. He stated that Plantation Tropical Preserve has only one final component of the management plan to complete, an 18ft by 20ft covered pavilion, which is currently under construction. Plantation Hammock Preserve has had no upgrades or additions under the management plan. Southwinds Park also does not have any current plans, although the state wants to see a pavilion built there. The Green Turtle Hammock Nature Preserve's final component of a large two-story pavilion is being constructed, and they have already completed improvements to the basin, stabilization of the shoreline, repairs to the dock, and added a wheelchair accessible kayak launch. The improvements are expected to be completed by March/April 2025. The Key Tree Cactus Preserve construction has been finished, with all improvements fulfilled through the master plan.

Peter stated that although the management plans dictate what improvements should be made within each park, we can always go back to the state to request changes to the plan. For example, some pickleball courts have been built at other Florida Community Trust properties, but the state evaluates them on a case-by-case basis. The state did not recommend removing trees at the Plantation Hammock Preserve to construct pickleball courts, although recommendations can still be made. Peter mentioned he would need to write up a proposal to send to the state for any ideas that we may want to move forward with. Carolyn asked to clarify with Peter that these properties are already owned by the Village but have been funded by the State DEP and mandated as conservation properties. Peter said that statement is correct. She also mentioned that the enhancements or improvements are budgeted by the Village as designated by the state's master plan. Peter stated that when the Village signed the paperwork on the master plans, it was agreed that the Village would find a way to fund these projects, either through grant money or budget.

Peter also gave a brief update on the Founders Park Breakwater improvement project. He stated that construction has just been completed to restore and elevate the breakwater, with approximately 40,000 tons of native material being laid, elevating the breakwater about 2 to 3 feet. This ended up being higher than expected by the engineers. A requirement of this project was to mitigate the mangroves, as some of them needed to be removed during construction. The planting of 177 mangroves has just been completed and needs to be monitored for the next 5 years, with at least an 85% survival rate. The only remaining task is to put sod down in the staging area where the grass was damaged. The breakwater will remain closed to the public until the mangroves are established.

## MARINA OPERATIONS:

Lisa Watts introduced herself as the Plantation Yacht Harbor Dockmaster. She has worked with the Village since 2002. She initially worked for the Parks and Recreation department

with Maria. She has been at the Marina since 2006 and has been the Dockmaster since 2013. She stated that there are approximately 82 boat slips in the Marina, which can be used monthly, yearly, and transient. The fees for these slips depend on the amount of time they are reserved for. The Marina is an Enterprise fund, meaning they are a for-profit business. There are 17 parking spots in the trailer lot located near the Marina that are for boat ramp users to park their car and trailer for the day. The other surrounding spots are reserved for Marina residents to park their smaller boats. Marina residents are allowed to park up to a 25-ft boat that they pay extra for. Last fiscal year, they made approximately \$138,000 between trailer parking and boat ramp fees. \$79,000 of that amount is trailer fees. Carolyn asked if there is any specific line or barrier that separates the Marina trailer parking from the rest of the park. Lisa explained that the road that separates the trailer lot from the tennis court area is basically the separation between Marina and Park. Christy asked where the collected Marina fees go. Lisa explained that they go into the Enterprise Fund because the Marina covers their own budget, projects, as well as any storm or other damage that may occur. None of those costs would come from taxpayer money.

Ted mentioned that he visited the park on a Saturday and noticed a sign at the gate entrance that read "Boat Trailer Parking Full", so he explored the trailer area and noticed only 11 trailer parking spots, 13 boat trailers without tags, 12 trailers with out of state tags, 6 trailers with expired tags, with some expiring up to 4 years ago. He asked if a Village resident could request a trailer spot to reserve for themselves while they use the boat ramp. Lisa stated there is not enough room to reserve spots in the trailer lot for residents. However, a resident will never be turned away from the boat ramp, and in those cases the grass area behind the Amphitheater can be utilized. Ted asked Lisa how much Marina residents are charged to leave their boats and trailers in the lot. She stated that it costs \$225 per month for a 25-15ft boat, and under 15ft is \$175 per month. She also clarified that the boats and trailers with expired or no tags belong to the annual boaters who live in the Marina year-round. Christy asked if those who are paying to store their boat/trailers in the lot are also paying to rent a slip in the Marina. Lisa said yes, that is correct.

Ted mentioned that as a fishing guide, he used to pay an annual fee to be able to have access to the boat ramp and pick up customers from the Marina. Lisa stated that this program was discontinued due to lack of use, lack of payment from users, damage to Marina property, and misuse of the boat ramp key they were given, resulting in a much more negative than positive outcome. Ted asked if that program could be reinstated. Lisa said she would not recommend it because of previous issues. She also mentioned that fishing guides can still pick up their customers from the Marina, they are just not able to use the boat ramp before normal operating hours as they used to with the previous program. Carolyn asked if it could be considered to have stacked parking for trailers to maximize fees and space. Lisa explained that logically it could be difficult, finding a place to store a fork truck to lift and lower the trailers and boats, as well as a lot of staff training and liability. David Epstein asked if there was a way for staff to publicize when someone would need to pick up their boat to avoid a fee if they left it at the Marina due to intoxication and

not being able to drive home. Lisa stated that the Marina does not have a policy for that, and anyone who leaves their boat overnight unauthorized will have to pay a dockage fee regardless of the reason. Carolyn expressed her appreciation for the clarification in this conversation, so that the Committee can better understand the distinction between Park and Marina and their functions and responsibilities.

#### **FOUNDERS PARK FEE SCHEDULE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION:**

Anne Onsgard gave a presentation on the Parks current fee structure, which was last reviewed in 2018. No changes were made at that time. Staff feels it is time to reevaluate the fees, however Staff has not made an official recommendation due to the Master Plan evaluation being underway and they will be evaluating the fees within that process. Anne provided the Committee with a complete overview of fees for the Park, including daily admission fees, holiday rates, membership fees, special event fees, pool rental fees, program fees and facility rental fees. Staff has also talked about possibly including a fee for Monroe County residents, that could be somewhere in between the regular daily rate and the free access for Islamorada residents.

Ted asked what the daily park revenue is during the slowest time and the busiest times of the year. Alicia stated that some years in the summer, the Park collects up to \$10,000 a day in fees including entrance, pool and program fees. On the lower end during slow season, it can average \$1000 to \$2000 a day. Ted expressed his concern about closing Park facilities during large events like the Nautical Market, especially if they are only being charged \$950 per day as an event fee. He asked if facilities like the beach, golf range, and dog park could remain open during these days for regular Park usage. Annie clarified that the dog park has never been shut down during an event, only parking area is not available due to the setup. The golf cage area is utilized by the vendors during that time, so it does need to be temporarily closed. Maria mentioned that although it may be difficult to access the park during large events due to the crowds, the facilities are still open and available for use. John asked if there had been any thought to continuing the increased rates and police support on weekends during the summer as was implemented this past year. Maria said yes, and the police coverage was included in the budget for this year. Ted expressed that he would like to see the increased weekend rate throughout the year, not only in summer.

Anne invited the Committee to the Founders Park Visioning Workshop on November 1<sup>st</sup> at the Community Center. This is a Founders Park Master Plan development workshop for the public to give their input.

#### **MASTER PLAN UPDATE:**

Maria updated the Committee on the Master Plan progress. She stated that last month Miller Legg had meetings with different focus groups, including this Committee, to get input on programs and facilities. The upcoming Visioning Workshop will be the first time that they will hear opinions from residents in the community only. Miller Legg will also

be sending out a survey via mail and the Village website. Once they gather the information from the community, they will further formulate the plan.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: TBD**

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman set the next regular meeting date as Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> at 5:00pm. Carolyn made a motion to adjourn, John seconded. The meeting ended at 7:12 P.M.

Recording Secretary,

Alicia Mote

Minutes Approved by Committee on  
Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman \_\_\_\_\_.